

# Free Afghanistan

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## Western Media Coverage of the War in Afghanistan

*by Julian Gearing*

## The Afghan Resistance and the Arabs

*by Olivier Roy*

## Women in the Jihad

*by Fatima Gailani*

# FOREWORD



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

We are now in the seventh year of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Soviet forces and the Afghan regime have laid waste villages and agriculture and inflicted terrible suffering on the population, driving some 4 million Afghans into exile. Up to a million more have been harried from their homes to live in internal exile in caves or as destitutes in the cities of Afghanistan.

Despite the enormous odds ranged against them, however, the Afghans have not been beaten down. They have maintained their heroic resistance: not even in the cities can the regime and the Soviet forces claim to enjoy complete control.

The free world cannot, however, stand by and ignore this massive violation of human rights and of the integrity of an independent nation, nor the destruction of the very fabric of its society and beliefs. That is why successive UN General Assemblies have so overwhelmingly condemned the Soviet occupation. There can be no solution until Soviet forces withdraw.

But it is not enough only to condemn. We must give every support we can to the Afghan people themselves and to Pakistan, which has so generously extended true hospitality to the refugees. And we must also work for a long-term, political solution acceptable to all parties. That is why we support the UN-sponsored talks aimed at a resolution of the problem. We shall do all we can to help find a way forward through negotiation.

The British Government will continue to help with practical measures. We have given over £29 million in bilateral aid so far, including the provision to victims of the fighting of medical treatment which is not available in Pakistan. And we are maintaining our aid.

But governments can only do so much. Voluntary organisations can complement their efforts: whether by helping raise and channel aid as Afghanaid does or, as the Afghanistan Support Committee and its sister organisations world-wide do, by working to create the climate which will allow constructive negotiations to move forward. I am therefore grateful for this opportunity to congratulate the Afghanistan Support Committee and Afghanaid on all you have achieved so far and to wish you well in your continuing endeavours, in the hope that together we may see an end to the terrible sufferings of the Afghan people.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Margaret Thatcher".

# Resistance Under Pressure: 1985

*Compiled by Julian Gearing and Barnaby Rogerson*

With the death of Konstantin Chernenko and the arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev in March 1985, attention focused on the possibility of a change in Soviet policy on Afghanistan. The question on people's minds was would Gorbachev relax pressure on the country in line with his amenable image?

It soon became very clear that this was not to be the case. 1985 has seen Soviet and Afghan government forces stepping up attacks not only on the resistance but also on the civilians. These have been primarily in the form of large-scale offensives, heavier than previously experienced, and ambushes, often at night. This is in response to the increasingly effective resistance fronts which are unifying and coordinating their activities more effectively. The major resistance commanders, Abdul

Haq of Kabul, Jalaludeen Haqani of Paktia, Ismail Khan of Herat, and Ahmed Shah Massoud of Panjshir, have all been stressing the need for internal unity. In March the seven major Peshawar-based parties formed an alliance in an attempt to fight as a more effective political force. Just how effective this will be remains to be seen, but there does appear to be a trend towards cooperation.

## **Pressure on Supply Routes**

In the mild winter months of early 1985 military conflict was greater than in previous years. The Soviet forces concentrated on strengthening their uncertain hold on Afghanistan's South-eastern border, in an effort to cut the resistance supply routes.

Despite all the fighting, the Soviet and Afghan forces made few real gains.

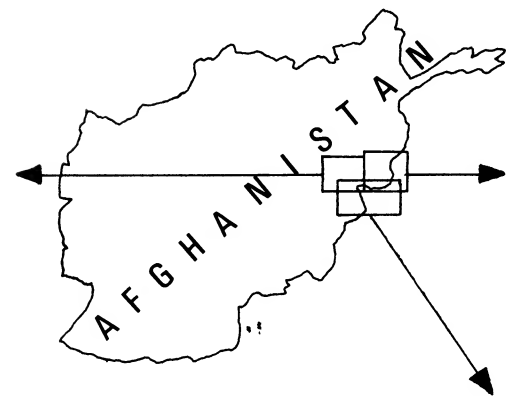
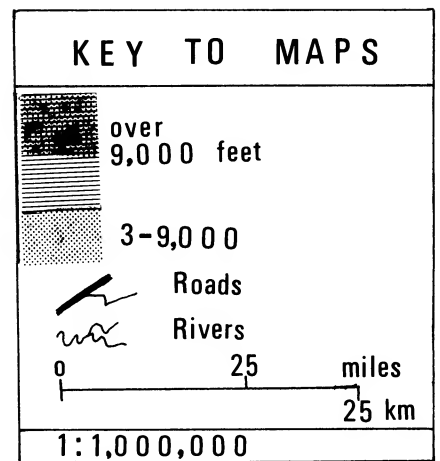
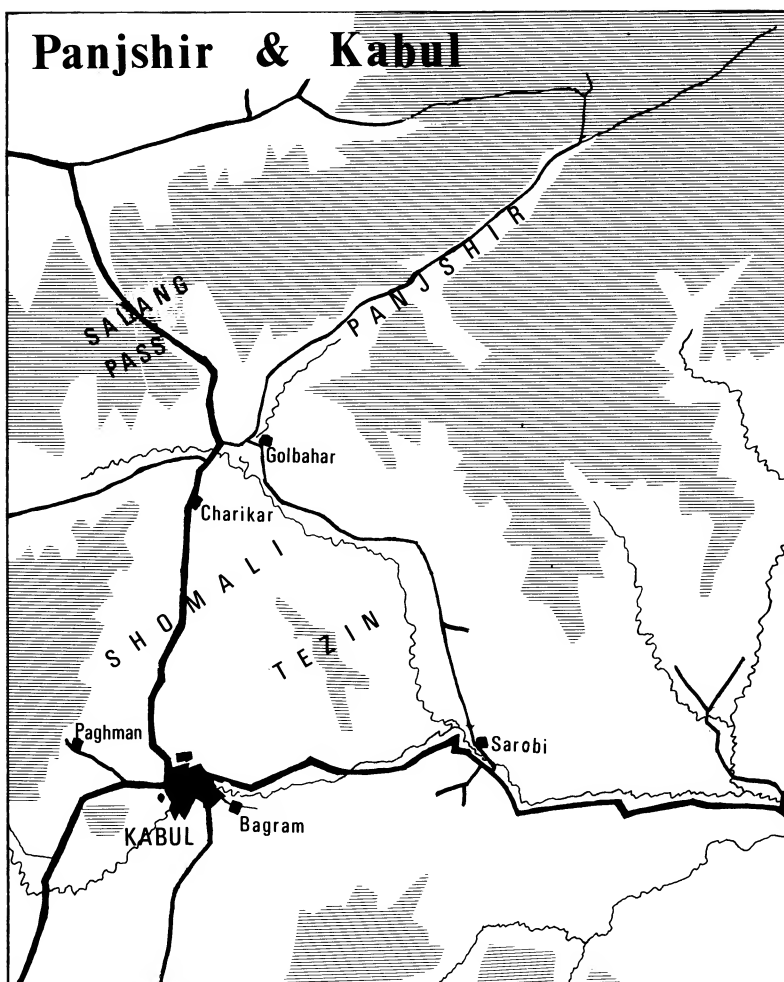
Their failure was particularly conspicuous in the Kunar Valley. The latter is crucial to both sides as it serves as a key infiltration route into eastern Afghanistan. Its significance was heightened by the Soviet need to end the resistance siege of the border garrison of Barikot. They had no greater success in Paktia. Reinforcement of the Soviet and Afghan units in Gardez and Khost in December 1984 appeared to herald a concerted drive to establish some real control over the resistance-held border areas. But while costly for both sides, the ensuing battles around Jaji and Lazha were seen as inconclusive and did little to bolster the regime's border post at Chamkani, also under heavy pressure.

## **Threat to Pakistan**

In a new and ominous turn in a

Heavy use of airpower and elite forces, combined with improved tactics, is increasing pressure on the Resistance. Soviet Mi-24 helicopter gunship in Parwan. Photo: P. Jouvanel





conflict which up to now has been confined to the Afghan battlefield, cross-border air strikes have sharply increased. When Gorbachev met President Zia of Pakistan he made it abundantly clear that the use of Pakistan territory by the increasingly well-armed resistance would have serious repercussions. Reporting on that meeting the Soviet news agency Tass said Gorbachev warned that 'aggressive actions' against the Kabul regime by rebels operating out of Pakistan 'cannot but affect in the most negative way Soviet-Pakistan relations'.

In 1985 these cross-border attacks fell short of the type of major incursion into Pakistan that would bring Soviet and Pakistani troops into head-on collision. However, an increasingly worrying development for the resistance is the subversion, infiltration, and disruption that the Kabul government is causing along the border and in Pakistan. Payments and arms given to border tribes, increased use of KHAD (secret police) agents, bomb attacks and assassination attempts aimed at Afghan targets in Pakistan, combined with pressure on the Pakistanis, is destabilising the region. Fears are being voiced that this may lead the Pakistan government to make concessions which could seriously affect the position of Afghans in Pakistan.

#### Cities under attack

On their own territory the Kabul

government has been attempting to reinforce its precarious hold of the major cities. In Kabul the building of three protective rings around the city has made resistance infiltration more difficult, but has failed to prevent rocket attacks. Combined with frequent assassinations, often due to the conflict between the two communist parties, the ruling Parcham faction and the Khalq, the atmosphere is tense, with most residents home well before the evening curfew.

In the city of Kandahar, in the south of Afghanistan, the resistance hold much of the territory, even during daylight hours. In one incident, in February, they destroyed 20 fighter aircraft on the ground at Kandahar airport, which resulted in two days of bombardment and shelling of civilians and the resistance in the surrounding areas. Soviet attention in the province has focussed on resistance supply routes from Pakistan, frequently in the form of ambushes of caravans of weapons. In many areas of the country, increased use of night tactics using heliborne commandos, and, on some occasions, 'Spetsnaz' forces, has resulted in 'guerrilla tactics being used against the guerrillas'. This is a situation the resistance is finding hard to cope with.

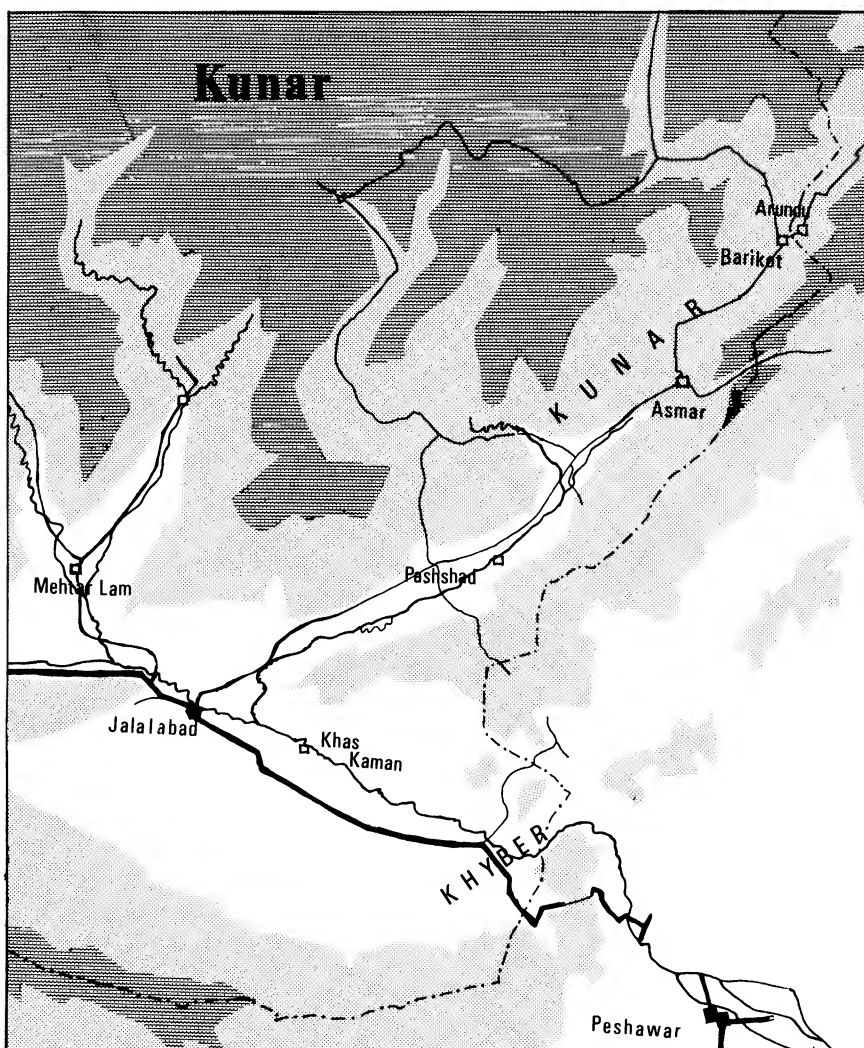
In the west of the country the city of Herat has also been the scene of major clashes. As with Kandahar, the area is flat and exposed, yet the resistance hold

much of the city and surrounding area. During October Soviet attempts to take control of the city led to many casualties on both sides. One attack resulted in the partial destruction of Herat Mosque in which 40 civilians were killed and 80 injured.

In the north the death of Commander Zabiullah in December 1984 reduced resistance activity in and around the city of Mazar-i-Sharif. His death, after his jeep hit a mine planted by another resistance group, did little to solve the differences between parties. However, recent reports indicate that their problems are being ironed out and that there is increasing cooperation. This is at a time when major building work is being carried out by the Soviet authorities to enlarge the city and to provide a protective ring, in the form of posts, bunkers, and a ring road, restricting resistance activity within the city.

#### Attacks and Counterattacks

In April, in the Maidan Valley leading into the Hazarajat, Shia resistance groups were the target of attack by a large Soviet force. Diplomatic sources suggest Frog-7 missiles were used for the first time in Afghanistan. Yet despite the heavy firepower employed they were ambushed by the resistance and both sides suffered heavy casualties. In the first five years of the war this area received little attention. However, more progress towards resis-



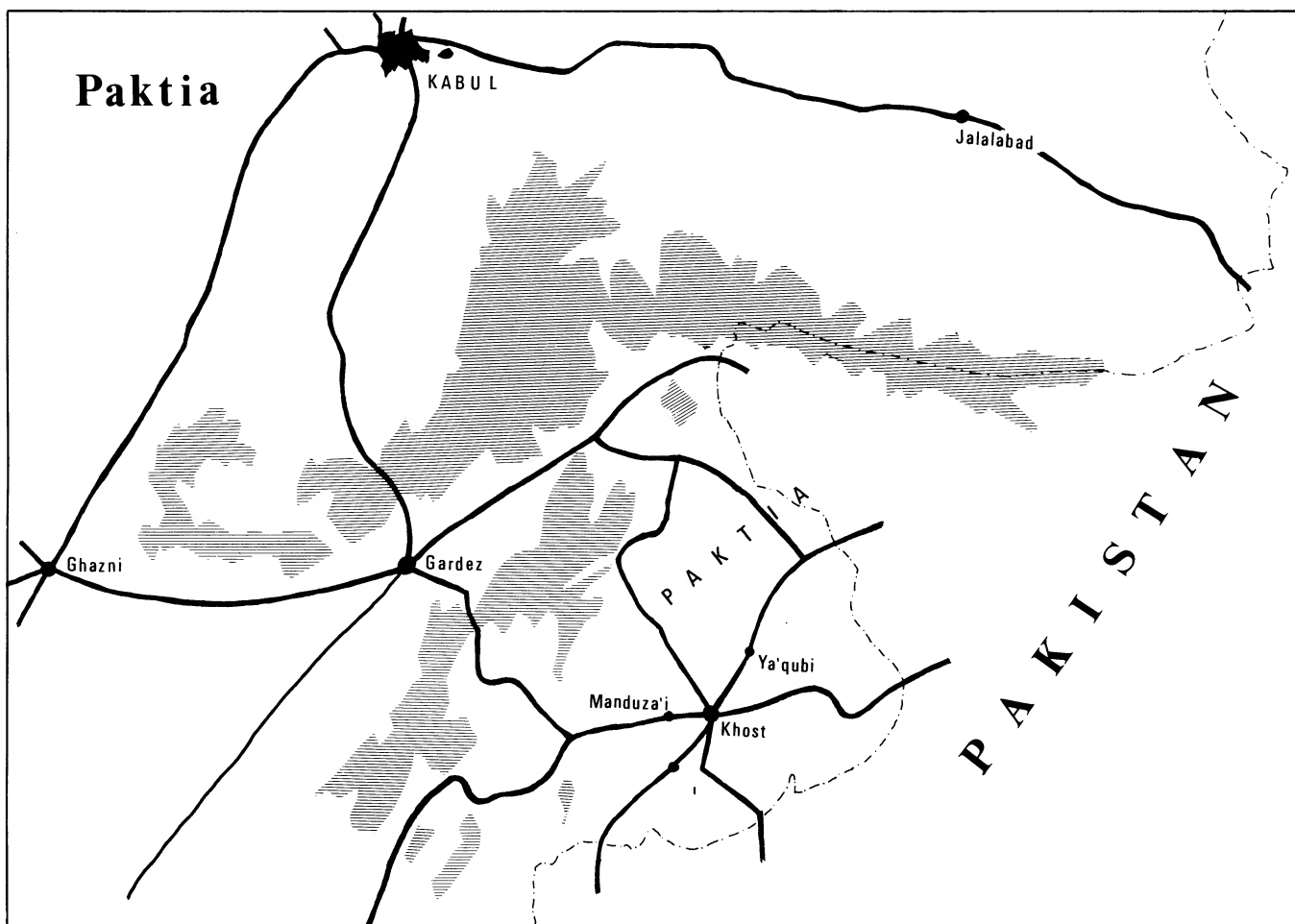
tance party unity and increasing aid from Iran now makes the area a threat to the Kabul government.

Resistance attacks have continued to disrupt the passage of Soviet convoys on the main roads between the cities. On the Salang Highway, the main supply route from the Soviet Union, resistance ambushes have become particularly effective. In one action in March, 300 vehicles, some carrying munitions, were reported destroyed and the road was blocked for four days. In June, in an action just north of the Salang tunnel, 150 were reported destroyed or damaged and over 100 Afghan army personnel captured. As with most attacks on the highway, Soviet retaliation was swift and heavy.

#### Large Scale Offensives

In May Kunar was the focus of attention in a concerted effort to break the stalemate. Intense air strikes on resistance positions on May 11 heralded a major offensive to relief the garrison of Barikot. Ten days later a large ground force of 10,000 soldiers backed by armoured vehicles began rolling up the valley.

Although resistance proved difficult if not impossible, progress was slow and the Soviet and Afghan army forces suffered many casualties. After they finally reached and reinforced Barikot on June 5, they pulled out, allowing the resistance to filter back. The assault badly shook the Mujahideen but failed



to block their supply routes.

In the west of the country the Mujahideen have also been the focus of heavy Soviet attacks. Due to the largest offensives directed at their strongholds in Helmand during the war, in May, June, and in late September, reports indicate that fighting between the different Mujahideen parties has ceased and that they are working together.

In the province of Farah Soviet attacks have centred on strongholds of resistance near the border with Iran. The province contains the strategically important and heavily protected Soviet airbase at Shindand which the Mujahideen have found difficult to attack. However, on 8th June the base resounded to explosions as a time bomb sparked the destruction of twenty fighter aircraft. According to resistance sources, this act of sabotage was carried out by members of the Afghan Air Force, in retaliation for the execution of pilots who had dropped their bombs harmlessly in the desert instead of on designated targets. The authorities subsequently arrested and executed the officers held responsible for the sabotage.

To the northeast of Kabul, the strategically important Panjshir Valley has been the scene of some of the heaviest fighting. Resistance success in hampering supplies to Soviet posts, situated in the lower half of the valley, and their increasing effectiveness in surrounding areas, resulted in a concerted Soviet effort to destroy their strongholds. One important Soviet post, Pushgoor, which had been under siege for over a year, fell to the resistance in June. This was a major setback for the government as amongst the 110 Afghan officers and 350 soldiers captured was an important delegation from the Ministry of Defence and Interior, Central Army Corp, and the KHAD (secret police). In an attempt to obtain the release of Mujahideen held by the government, Panjshir leader Massoud attempted to negotiate an exchange in return for the officers. According to a spokesman for Jamiat-i-Islami the government were willing to negotiate, but the Soviet authorities were not.

In an attempt to recapture the prisoners and crush the resistance, heavy bombing was accompanied by the landing of heliborne commandos. In the heaviest fighting to date in the Panjshir both sides suffered heavy losses. All the captured officers were reported killed in the Soviet bombing, and with heavy Soviet air cover, Pushgoor was then retaken by the Soviet forces.

Paghman Valley, a Resistance stronghold twelve miles west of Kabul, has also been the focus of attention. Several Soviet attacks took place in June and July and at the beginning of September the area was occupied after a heavy battle in which casualties were high on both sides including the death of eight important Resistance

commanders. Subsequent attacks and counter-attacks eventually forced the Resistance to retreat and enabled the Soviet forces to establish posts in the area.

In August, Paktia was the scene of one of the heaviest Soviet offensives. An estimated 10,000 ground troops reinforced by armoured vehicles and air cover fought its way to the besieged garrison of Khost, whilst aircraft touched down briefly on the airstrip to resupply the government troops.

When the Soviet and Afghan army forces emerged to attack, they faced resistance with deeply entrenched positions to defend who were forced to stand and fight. One amazed observer compared it to World War One tactics with heavy casualties on both sides. With the simultaneous defence of Jaji, near the border crossing of Teri Mangal, the high number of casualties coming across the border into Pakistan forced the Red Cross Hospital in Peshawar to declare a state of emergency.

#### Massacres

A UN sponsored report compiled by Felix Ermacora published in February, strongly condemned the 'foreign' forces and Afghan government for the grave abuse of Human rights in Afghanistan. This came out in a year which has seen an unprecedented level of massacres aimed principally at civilians. The Soviet forces have been using terror tactics in attempts to break up the civilian support for the Mujahideen. In separate incidents 800 civilians were reported killed in January in Kunduz, over 600 in April in Laghman, 200 in Ghazni in June, and more than 300 in September in Helmand. Smaller incidents were also reported in Kunar, Logar, Kandahar and Baghlan. What distinguishes these from attacks on civilians in the earlier stages of the war is that they appear to have been carried out either by Soviet elite forces, or by 'SPETSNAZ', KGB special units known as the 'commandos of death'. One survivor, Mohammad Yossof, a former Afghan army officer, described what happened in his village:

"Suddenly it was the big attack. BM-13 (Stalin organs) rockets started falling and aircraft bombarded the surrounding hills. The population was running in panic to hide but tanks and armoured vehicles entered the villages of Charbagh. Qarghayee, Mindrawar. Nobody could go from one village to another. The Russians asked for money and the ones who had not any to give were killed alike. Even in the smallest villages between 20 and 25 people were killed in this manner. More than 2,000 cows, sheep and goats were exterminated. The operations lasted two days, then the Russians started moving towards Jalalabad. The population had only one day to bury

their dead. The following day, the enemy returned and advanced up to Pul-e-Jogi and Shalatak; houses were looted again and burned down. In our region 150 civilians lost their lives in this second attack. Women were raped and summarily executed. At Shaltak, about 20 women and children had shut themselves inside a house. The Russians first threw hand-granades inside the house and then set it on fire; all the occupants were burned to death." (Source: A.I.C.)

#### Withdrawal of troops linked to cessation of aid

On the diplomatic front the UN peace talks have yet again failed to produce concrete results. The latest round in December of these indirect talks between the Pakistan and Afghan governments foundered over the key issue of the withdrawal of Soviet troops. One of the major stumbling blocks is that aid to the resistance should cease before such a withdrawal. With no guarantees, this condition is unlikely to be met.

Principal suppliers of aid to the resistance have been the US, China and the Middle East, yet there appears to be a large gap between the amount and type of weapons said to be going in and what is actually received. The US government claim to be giving \$250 M in covert aid for the current fiscal year, some of which, it has been stated is being used to buy portable anti-aircraft weapons. However, reference to Mujahideen commanders inside Afghanistan has shown that the vast majority is in the form of light weapons, often of poor quality. 'The commanders are clearly dismayed at the lack of real support; stated one observer after talking to the major commander of the Kabul area, Abdul Haq. The supply of light weapons allows the Mujahideen to continue fighting but fails to increase the effectiveness in combating heavy Soviet airpower. Although US intelligence sources insist that their 'weapons pipeline' has been largely effective, there is little evidence of this inside the country.

#### Soft Talk, Hard Action

Although Gorbachev discussed the subject of Afghanistan at the summit meeting with Reagan in November, the talking then and since appears to have been designed to dampen criticism of a war which has become a real headache for the Soviet government.

Despite the optimism shown in some circles, the chance of an early end to this increasingly vicious war appears small. Far from preparing to withdraw, the Soviet forces are digging in, and the outlook for 1986 looks bleak.



# The Afghan Resistance and the Arabs

by Olivier Roy

The Afghan war has had very little impact on Arab public opinion, at least until 1985. Governments stand according to their traditional position; conservative or pro Western states condemned the Soviet invasion (Saudi Arabia even broke off diplomatic relations with the Kabul regime), while pro Soviet states (Syria, Libya, South Yemen) approved the invasion. Algeria and Iraq took no public stand. The Kabul regime was suspended from the Islamic conference, but its seat was not given to the resistance, who merely have observer status. Egypt and Saudi Arabia gave immediate support to the resistance (military from the former, financial from the latter), but Egyptian support was withdrawn after Sadat's assassination. The Saudis remain sole advocates of the Afghan cause.

Most of the Arab media focused on the Palestinian cause and saw the invasion as just a disturbing fact. The Afghans got some support from conservative and fundamentalist circles, mostly from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. The only outstanding journal who supported them from the beginning is *Arabia*, the UK based Islamic monthly.

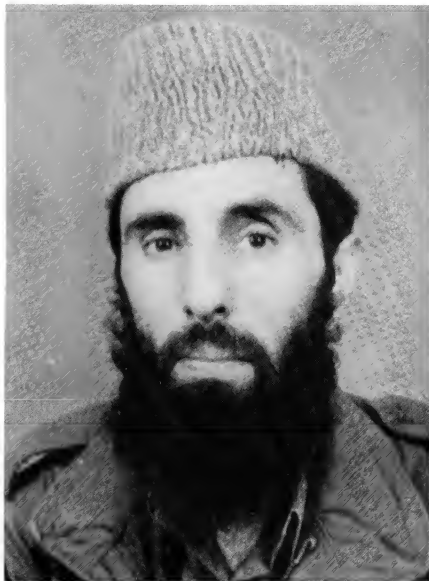
Why such a distance? The first reason is that Afghanistan is not an

Arab country, and, in arabic countries, Muslim solidarity stands often for Arab nationalism; the Palestinian struggle, which is a nationalist one, is seen as representing more the Muslim cause than the Afghan war. The second reason is that Afghanistan is almost unknown by Arab intellectual circles, who have a tendency to see it as a backward country, not only economically but also religiously: *Arab News*, a Saudi newspaper, in an article in favour of the resistance wrote, on 14th September 1985 (page 9): "The Muslim scholars in the world have a great role to play in enlightening the ignorant Afghans."

But the situation may be changing. In 1985, for the first time, numbers of Arabs went inside Afghanistan, either to bring some help or to fight. Most of them were members of fundamentalist groups (like the Muslim Brothers, *Ahl al-Hadith*, or *Wahhabi* organisations). Mostly they come from countries which have strong or at least good relations with USSR; Iraq, Lybia, Algeria, Syria and Palestinian organisations, but claimed to be opponents of these regimes; they also opposed Western influence among the Afghan resistance. Of course, the religious

preaching going with this support irritated some Afghans, who never thought of themselves as ignorant in *shariat* or *tafsir*. But the political impact of this support is worthwhile.

In fact excluding the Afghan resistance from the Islamic Conference is not very logical, because of the strong Muslim background of the resistance. Lack of unity among the resistance and a wish not to antagonize pro-Soviet Arab states were reasons given for excluding the Afghans from the conference. But at a time when the Afghan resistance is able to send a unified delegation to the UN to challenge the Kabul regime's credentials, and when the vote against the USSR has never been so strong at the General Assembly, it is more difficult for the Islamic conference to keep aloof from the Afghan struggle. So one could imagine that the next diplomatic step of the coalition of the Afghan resistance Parties will logically be to ask for full membership of the Islamic conference, and that will push its members to choose between a mostly Arab oriented conference or a truly universal Muslim assembly.



Pir Gailani (Mahaz-i-Milli) above, present spokesman for the Mujahideen Alliance, and left, Gulbudeen Hekmatyar (Hisb-i-Islami) the previous spokesman

# Human Rights in Afghanistan

by Sir Oliver Forster

Last February, the United Nations produced one of the frankest and most hard-hitting reports on the conduct of a member of the United Nations that has ever been produced. The report was by Dr Felix Ermacora, Special Rapporteur of the **UN Commission on Human Rights**, on the human rights situation in Afghanistan.

Dr Ermacora is a distinguished Austrian lawyer with a long experience in human rights investigations for the UN, particularly in Chile and South Africa, and his report is impressive for its sober objectivity and the sheer weight of the evidence he adduces. Of course, it can be argued that it is one sided, in that all the evidence came from the victims of many violations of human rights of which the Afghan regime stands accused. But that is not Dr Ermacora's fault. He appealed repeatedly to the regime to cooperate with him and allow him to visit Afghanistan to carry out his mandate, "in the most impartial and objective manner". He did not even get a reply. After he had collected all the evidence, he informed the Babrak Karmal regime of the nature of the allegations against them and invited their comments. There was once again no reply. This despite the fact that Afghanistan is a party to the South International Convention on Human Rights.

But it is not particularly surprising, the Babrak Karmal regime has never submitted reports to the **Human Rights Commission** as it is supposed to under the Convention. Although a party to the Geneva Convention of 1949, it refuses to cooperate with the **International Committee of the Red Cross** and will not allow the Red Cross into Afghanistan. It has refused to cooperate with **Amnesty International**. It refuses to allow international observers into Afghanistan and the French journalist Jacques Aboucher who was captured in 1984 while making a film in Afghanistan was sentenced to eighteen years imprisonment for entering Afghanistan illegally and carrying out "prohibited activities and collecting information". Clearly the regime has a lot to hide.

What it has to hide is comprehensively expressed in the Ermacora Report. And not only in this report. In the last month or so there have also been reports on human rights in Afghanistan from **Amnesty International**, the American organisation **Helsinki Watch**, the European organisation **International Humanitarian Enquiry Commission**, and the French organisation **Afrane**. In the absence of cooperation or information from the

Afghan regime, these reports rely on the evidence of Afghan refugees in Pakistan and others who have escaped from Afghanistan, and on reports from foreign observers who have travelled inside Afghanistan. The coincidence of stories told, the corroboration of atrocities from different and independent sources, the fact that these stories come from ordinary people who bear the physical marks of their suffering and who have no political axe to grind, all add up to an impressive, and even allowing for some exaggeration, entirely convincing body of evidence. They add up to what Dr Ermacora describes as "a situation of gross violation of human rights".

These violations came under several heads. In the first place there is complete and utter denial of political and civil rights in Afghanistan. The Babrak Karmal regime, like the two regimes which preceded it, was, in Dr Ermacora's words, "not elected by the people of Afghanistan, had never submitted to a free expression of will by the population and was therefore unrepresentative." This has of course been demonstrated by the country-wide resistance to the regime. The regime sought to carry out a number of sweeping reforms which were offensive to the customs, tradition and religious beliefs of the majority of the population and were strongly opposed particularly in the rural areas. Many eyewitnesses described to Dr Ermacora and other observers what happened next. Stern measures by the regime to enforce the reforms leading to clashes between the civilians and the Civil Authorities, leading in turn to harsh reprisals against the opponents of the regime. As Dr Ermacora says, the intervention of foreign, i.e. Soviet troops, had the effect of escalating the violence as well as that of suppression of the opponents to the reforms.

The treatment of the opponents to the regime is as brutal as in any totalitarian regime that lacks popular support. **Amnesty International** quotes many cases of savage prison sentences for no more than peaceful opposition to the regime and reports sixty eight people to have been officially executed in 1984. **Helsinki Watch** quotes cases of arrest for observing normal religious duties and reports from prisoners indicate that dozens, perhaps as many as a hundred, are taken for execution from the main Pul-e-Charki jail. **The International Humanitarian Commission** believe that no less than 27,000 people were executed in this jail in eighteen months, between 1978 and

1980, including most of Afghanistan's educated elite and religious leaders. A former judge of the Afghan Supreme Court who escaped to India, reported that revolutionary courts, often consisting of members of the Khad, the Afghan intelligence service, with no legal training, arbitrarily took over cases of opponents or presumed opponents of the regime, and sentenced them to death: sometimes the sentence was recorded after the execution and the victim never appeared in court. The total number of innocent people killed in the regime will probably never be known.

Torture of the political opponents in the Afghan jails is reported by Dr Ermacora to be commonplace as to have "almost assumed the character of an administrative practice." **Amnesty International** says that it continues to receive persistent reports of torture in custody not only of people accused of armed resistance but also of those arrested simply on suspicion of non-violent political activity such as distributing pamphlets. **Amnesty International** also reports allegations of the presence of Soviet advisers at detention centres where torture is carried out. **Helsinki Watch** also reports many accounts by victims of torture who had subsequently been released or escaped and some of them had been interrogated by Soviet advisers or had seen Soviet advisers giving advice on torture which was carried out by the Afghans. The French journalist Jacques Aboucher, in his descriptions of his time in the Kabul central jail gives a chilling and moving account of the state of some of his cell-mates, one only fifteen years old, after they returned from interrogation and torture.

It is not only in jail that people suffer. Because of the new collapse of the Afghan Army due to the desertion to the resistance, conscription was introduced into the regime and in 1982 the age for drafting into the army was lowered to fifteen: the length of service was raised to four years in 1984. This has led to widespread evasion and flight of the young people to Pakistan or to the resistance to avoid conscription. The regime has resorted to press gangs and many witnesses talk of houses raided to search for eligible youngsters and of youngmen kidnapped off the streets to serve in the army. More sinister are the allegations of children taken, with or without the consent of the family, to be educated in the USSR. **Helsinki Watch** quotes many such incidents. Some families were persuaded to let their children go by





Death of a family — in one of countless incidents, these women and children were rounded up by Soviet troops, trussed up, and burnt alive. Jagdelek, east of Kabul. Photo: Pam Morris

promise of financial benefits; others were threatened; and in some cases children were simply taken despite the protests of their parents. One witness reported more than three hundred children between the ages of seven and nine, sent to the Soviet Union in 1983; another reported children as young as three years old being sent. Parents are usually told that the children are going for three to six months but some children have since written to say that they have been told that they will stay in the USSR for ten years. In 1984 Babrak Karmal talked about a ten year education programme in the Soviet Union. There are many reports from the countryside, of orphans being rounded up after their parents have been killed in the fighting, and sent to the Soviet Union for education.

But perhaps the worst violations of human rights are taking place in the countryside. Here it is not the opponents or the suspected opponents of the regime who suffer but innocent villagers who happen to get caught up in the fighting or are the subject of savage reprisals by the Soviet or regime forces. We know that nearly four million of these — nearly a third of the population of Afghanistan — have fled

to Pakistan or Iran leaving everything — homes, lands, possessions and often members of their families en route. According to Dr Ermacora, another one and a half million have been forced to abandon their houses and have taken refuge in larger towns. Probably, an equal number, if not more, are hiding in the mountains and safe areas inside Afghanistan; we know of 130,000 displaced civilians in the Panjshir Valley area alone.

Dr Ermacora devotes the largest section of his report to the casualties sustained by the civilian population as a result of the war. He sets out the evidence he obtained from refugees in Pakistan, the stories corroborated time and again by many different sources. It is a damning indictment of the conduct of the Soviet and Babrak Karmal forces. The village surrounded by Soviet tanks in the evening; the searches of houses at dawn; interrogations, looting, killing of women and old people; the destruction of houses, crops, cattle and the survivors' means of livelihood. The same stories were repeated so often to the other international organisations that have studied the human rights situation in Afghanistan that there must be some

bedrock of truth to them. **Helsinki Watch** has many similar accounts and the **International Humanitarian Enquiry Commission** team travelling inside Afghanistan picked up the same story time and time again from refugees on the way to Pakistan who had lost everything.

Darker stories of atrocities are legion. Dr Ermacora reports twenty people, including eight women, executed in the village square after one village had been overrun by soldiers in February 1985. **Helsinki Watch** reports a massacre by Soviet and regime troops in a village in Kunduz Province in 1984, in the course of which troops went systematically through each house killing the inhabitants. The surviving villagers estimated that two hundred and fifty men, women and children were killed; they loaded the dead bodies on to the carts and took them to the Governor of the Province, who said it had been done without his knowledge. Similar mass killing have been reported from Laghman Province — one hundred and fifty civilians in one village, seventy five women and children in another — some committed by Soviet troops alone. **The International Humanitarian**

**Enquiry Commission** were told stories of similar atrocities in the Logar and Ghazni areas in September and October 1985. Their report lists eight such instances, with casualties to the civilians in three cases of sixty eight, forty five and sixty. These atrocities were clearly deliberate and part of a Soviet offensive through Logar to Ghanzi followed by a scorched-earth policy to destroy all agricultural settlements along the road; the operation was commanded by the Soviet General Osmanas.

Dr Ermacora draws attention to many other horrors. The anti-personnel bombs and mines dropped along the route, used by the refugees to escape to Pakistan; all of us who have

visited the refugee camps and hospitals in Pakistan are familiar with the sight of a child with a foot or a leg blown off by one of these devices. The killing of resistance prisoners taken, reciprocated unfortunately but understandably by the Resistance, on the grounds that they are not prisoners of war. This, the use of anti-personnel mines against civilians and the victimisation of civilians, particularly women and children, are, as Dr Ermancora points out, contrary to the Geneva Convention of August 1949, to which both Afghanistan and the USSR are signatories.

So 1985 has been another appalling year for human rights in Afghanistan. The evidence is massive and difficult to

refute. It has now been laid in all its starkness and horror before the United Nations. Afghanistan must surely be one of the worst countries for systematic and ruthless violations of human rights in almost every field. Four million Afghan refugees who have fled their country and millions of others who remain inside to fight their oppressors, testify to this fact. No amount of excuses about outside interference can explain away these figures and this evidence. Fortunately the Afghan people are made of pretty stern stuff, as the British learned to their cost, and six years of ruthless oppression have still not crushed their spirit.

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## Extracts from statements issued on 27 December 1985 to mark the Sixth Anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan

### From the President of the United States of America

Today, December 27th, marks the sixth anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

The Soviet supported regime in Kabul has failed to gain even a modicum of popular support or international acceptance. The Soviets, and their Afghan surrogates have resorted to Barbaric methods of waging war in their effort to crush this war of national liberation.

The United States has strongly advocated a negotiated political settlement, the only reasonable alternative to the bleak prospect of an open-ended military struggle.

The U.S. reiterated its support for UN sponsored talks during the November summit meetings in Geneva. We also indicated that the continued Soviet occupation of Afghanistan remains an obstacle to overall improvement in our relationship.

The victims of this war also command American attention. The United States has played and will continue to play, a major role in the humanitarian efforts to alleviate the suffering of the two to three million Afghan refugees now living in Pakistan. Since 1980, we have spent over \$430 million in aid. We have allocated, in the current two year time frame, almost \$25 million in assistance to the brave people who remain inside Afghanistan.

When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan six long and bloody years ago, few in the West knew much about that distant land and its proud people. That certainly has changed, as the Afghan people, in their determination to defend their liberty, have added new chapters to the long annal of human courage in the face of tyranny. Forged in a similar crucible two centuries ago, the United States stands

squarely on the side of the people of Afghanistan and will continue its support of their historic struggle in the cause of liberty.

### From the British Foreign Secretary

"I think one must note the fact that there has been the largest ever majority in the United Nations calling for Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. But if one looks at what's happening on the ground; the fighting has become even more intense, but brings no sign of an end to the bitter war that's been taking place there."

"What cannot be denied is that the key to a recognition of the real wishes of the Afghan people; a key to the dreadful suffering that is taking place — the huge displacement of refugees — the huge suffering being inflicted on the people of Afghanistan, the key to any change in that does lie with the Soviet Union. If they indicate and are willing to implement an intention to withdraw their forces from Afghanistan then the future could be very different."

"I see very little sign to encourage the belief that a major change of Soviet policy in Afghanistan is going to take place. The opinion of the world continues to call for such a change, the immense, courageous resistance of the Afghan people continues to require such a change, but I don't know how long it will be before common sense does break through, if it ever will, in the Soviet Union, on this desperately serious issue."

"We shall go on sustaining the pressure — not because we wish to embarrass the Soviet Union, but because for human, libertarian, civil rights reasons it is important for the people of Afghanistan to be allowed the right to choose their future and not to have

to live for ever either displaced as refugees or in subjection to a foreign occupation army."

"We admire very much the sustained presentation of the case by the people on the ground — the resistance movement — and we are anxious to do all we can to help the millions of people living there as refugees until this situation comes to an end, if it ever does."

### From the Foreign Minister of the Federal German Republic

The Afghan people, through its lasting opposition to the occupation, is demonstrating its unbroken will for self-assertion and struggle for independence and freedom.

This has demanded a huge sacrifice. Hundreds of thousands of Afghans have paid a price for their courage with life and limb. Millions have had to leave their homes. For most, Pakistan has offered refuge and security and wins our respect and recognition for its humanity. The Federal Government will also continue to do all it can to contribute to the burden of alleviating the suffering.

The principles of humanity, self-determination, non-alignment and sovereignty must also be allowed to apply in Afghanistan, as demonstrated convincingly by the UN Resolutions on Afghanistan.

The Federal Government appeals to the Soviet Union to agree to a long-term, political solution to the conflict. The efforts made by the UN Secretary General at mediation offer the opportunity for this. They point the way to the means of bringing about the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan and the return to the country of its independence and non-alignment.

## From the Iranian Foreign Ministry

Six years have passed since the occupation of the Islamic state of Afghanistan, which resulted in the martyrdom or injuring of hundreds of thousands of innocent Afghan people, homelessness for more than 4 million innocent human beings, and the destruction of thousands of hamlets.

The sixth anniversary of the military occupation of Afghanistan occurs at a time when talks have been held in Geneva between the leaders of the East and West. At the time when these talks were held, the Islamic Republic of Iran announced: The solution of the problems of the region, including a decision on Afghanistan, are the business of the people of that country, have nothing to do with foreign powers, and should be solved within the region itself. The Afghan Muslim revolutionaries will continue their persistent struggle until their lofty goals are achieved; with the help of Almighty God, they see their final victory approaching ever nearer.

In condemning the military occupation of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran once again proclaims its complete support for the righteous struggles of the Muslim nation of Afghanistan. As it has repeatedly declared, Iran states that the only fundamental solution of the problem of Afghanistan lies in the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the occupation forces and their nonreplacement by any other arrogant force, thereby creating the necessary conditions for the return of

Afghan refugees and the determination of the fate of that country by the Muslim people of Afghanistan, leading toward the construction of an independent country.

## From the French Ministry for External Affairs

Six years after the Soviet intervention, the Afghan problem is still unsolved. The Afghan people's courageous resistance and the virtually unanimous feelings of solidarity it has aroused show beyond all possible doubt that the inanity of any solution resting on force and the negation of people's legitimate aspirations.

France, who sympathises with the sufferings of the Afghan population and is aware of the risks created in the region by the continuation of this conflict, has ceaselessly condemned the *fait accompli*. As in previous years, she voted this year, along with a growing number of States, for the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly calling for the withdrawal of the foreign troops, free self-determination for the Afghan people, non-alignment for Afghanistan and the voluntary return home of the refugees.

France is closely following and supporting the efforts undertaken by the United Nations Secretary-General with a view to a political settlement of the issue. She wishes to see a speedy start made on a dialogue between all the parties, so as to work out solutions in keeping with the legitimate rights and security interests of all concerned.

## From the Swedish Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

The Afghan civilian population are daily exposed to terrible suffering. As a small country Sweden has a special reason for reacting when the fates of other small nations are in jeopardy.

The war in Afghanistan has been going on for almost six years. In his address, Pierre Schori repeated the Swedish Government's condemnation of the contravention of International Law and the UN Charter that the Soviet Union has been guilty of in Afghanistan ever since the beginning of the intervention in 1979.

Mr Schori established that the violations of Human Rights have been justly criticised in the UN Commission on Human Rights.

The latest weapons have been used to crush the resistance movement and Mr Schori stated that the need for humanitarian aid in Afghanistan is growing with the increasing numbers of victims.

Sweden supports the activities carried out by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and different voluntary organisations, among them the Swedish Afghanistan Committee, to assist the refugees and the groups most afflicted by the war. Mr Schori went on to say that the Swedish contributions up to now have amounted to SEK 80 million and that the Government recently decided to contribute a further SEK 10 million.

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# Western Media Coverage of the War in Afghanistan

*by Julian Gearing*

The Americans claim that one of the factors that led to their defeat in Vietnam was the heavy, virtually instantaneous, media coverage. In 1985, scenes on television vividly portrayed the unrest in South Africa, and brought home to people around the world the problems of apartheid. Yet this coverage was dramatically curtailed after restrictions were imposed on reporting.

The curtain fell on media coverage of Afghanistan shortly after the Soviet invasion, and now, six years on, the war receives little attention. Unlike the almost daily television reports of the major crises in Lebanon, there are no live broadcasts from Afghanistan and seldom dramatic headlines in the newspapers. 'The level of coverage of the war is abysmally low, almost non-existent,' stated Sandy Gall recently. 'It is astonishing that the coverage is not increasing as the war continues and intensifies.'

In order to discover the reasons for this lack of interest in a conflict which has forced over four million people to flee their country, and resulted in over half a million deaths, it is necessary to look first at the opening chapter of the conflict.

### First Encounters

Shortly after the Soviet invasion, in the first two or three months of 1980, access to the country was relatively easy. Some journalists managed to travel on some of the roads and in the cities, often posing as tourists. 'The Times' correspondent, Robert Fisk, was at one stage able to hitch a ride on a Soviet convoy and was given a rifle in case they were attacked. During the same period a few journalists managed to enter the country clandestinely from Pakistan with the mujahideen.

In the early stages the Soviet forces kept a low profile, and the Afghan re-

sistance lacked organisation, training, and weapons. The result was a picture of relative inactivity. It was not long before all journalists were officially banned by the Afghan government in an attempt to black out media coverage. This meant that the only way of covering the war was by sneaking over the border with the mujahideen. Many of those who followed this course were clearly unprepared physically, culturally, and linguistically, which, together with the lack of understanding and organisation on the part of the mujahideen, led to poor trips and negative stories. Even the photographer Don McCullin, who has produced moving images of conflicts around the world, failed to come out with any striking pictures.

The resulting image of the mujahideen as a poorly armed bunch of rabble who fought ineffectually set the scene. Word got around that there was 'no real

Little time to relax — journalists and Afghan guide watch as a Soviet reconnaissance aircraft flies overhead. Photo: J. Gearing



story', and besides the forays inside were hard work. Equally journalists faced problems in attempting to verify the level of successes and failures of the mujahideen.

#### **The Numbers Game**

Then as now, many correspondents, partly or wholly, relied on resistance and diplomatic sources for their information about what was happening inside the country. This has led on some occasions to gross inaccuracies. Over-inflated figures of resistance successes if added up would lead to the conclusion that the whole Soviet contingent has been wiped out. At one time it was jokingly said that to find the correct number of Soviet casualties reported by the resistance in any action, it was necessary to take the number and knock a zero off the end. Although today the resistance are taking more care to produce correct figures, the scepticism of journalists remains. Reports of massacres this year have largely been played down by the media due to this factor, despite the realisation that something dramatic had taken place.

#### **Threat to Journalists**

In 1984 the Soviet ambassador to

Pakistan, Vitaly Smirnov, warned that any journalists caught 'illegally' inside Afghanistan would be 'eliminated'. The Afghan government does not allow Western journalists to visit the war zones, and the few who obtain permission to enter the country are normally those it is thought will put over a sympathetic view of the regime. Even then they are unlikely to be allowed out of the confines of Kabul.

For journalists who wish to cover the war the only method is to enter the country clandestinely from Pakistan. Unlike the helicopter rides in Vietnam, and filming from hotel windows in Beirut today, getting close to the action can prove difficult and few areas are easy to reach. Although some near the border have received an adequate level of coverage, for example the siege of Khost in Paktia, most involve anything from a week to two month's walk over difficult terrain. Travelling with the mujahideen, often at night, with poor food, little sleep, and under threat of Soviet attack, it is hardly a 'cushy assignment'. According to Sandy Gall, who has made two trips inside to date, the factors that have put journalists off are that it is 'a long way away . . . its very hard going, and there are no

hotels, or alcohol.' Word has gone around that it is a tough assignment with no guarantee of coming out with a 'good story'.

#### **'Bang, Bang'**

Film crews in war zones face the problem of obtaining exciting film for news programmes which demand 'action footage'. Afghanistan is no exception. But the action is scattered and unpredictable. And being in the right place at the right time is not always enough. One cameraman who has been in on a number of occasions to film attacks on convoys on the Salang Highway has shown that the way to get good shots is to move in close. However, few camera crews appear willing to take the risks. In 1985 British television only showed two pieces of exciting 'action footage'. But the risks are relatively small if handled competently. Although it can be dangerous, especially when on the wrong end of a Soviet offensive, to date only two journalists have been killed in action, one in an accident, and only a handful arrested.

Television is a powerful media, but unless more film crews make the effort to cover the war, there will not be the

level of coverage that prompted a reaction against the war in Vietnam, and more recently, against apartheid in South Africa.

### **Lack of Editorial Interest**

Apart from the apparent lack of interest and commitment by journalists, one of the problems is that editors appear unwilling to assign them for the length of time it takes to cover a story. It is the time and distance which are major factors in the lack of editorial interest. By the time the journalist has come out and filed a story it may be considered old news. It is a vicious circle, in which the low level of coverage fails to generate interest among the media editors and the public.

### **A Freelancer's War**

Despite all the difficulties, there is a hardcore of journalists who frequently make trips inside. Just as the Vietnam war attracted the adventurous, some breaking into the field for the first time, so Afghanistan attracts people willing to spend the time and take the risks inherent in covering the story. But it takes more than a desire for excitement. As with any war, tackling such a venture requires commitment and an interest in the subject.

Since the invasion, freelancers have travelled to many areas of the country. It is normally their first-hand reports which give an insight into what is actually going on inside. Although practice does not always make perfect, many have found these trips easier to organise and carry out as they gain experience. Gaining the respect and confidence of the Mujahideen is a real step forward and often has resulted in journalists being able to obtain good stories. One young journalist, Ed Gorman, was so well accepted by them that they allowed him to be driven through Kabul in a jeep disguised as a Russian officer for a first-hand impression of the situation.

One of the problems freelancers face is trying to sell their material. Newcomers often find this difficult due to lack of experience and wary editors. Those who do sell normally find the rates of pay low, unless they come out with a 'scoop'. However, it is mostly the freelancers who not only bring out the news, but also appear capable of doing so. The attitude of the media is slowly changing, and they may be relied on more in the future to satisfy what may prove to be a trend towards increased coverage.

### **Lack of Understanding**

One of the problems of trying to obtain good coverage in the early stages of the war was the resistance groups' lack of awareness of the importance of Western media coverage in publicising

their predicament. Today, although their competence in fighting has developed beyond many people's expectations, in the field of publicity they still lack sufficient numbers of good interpreters to accompany journalists. In the past some groups distrusted Westerners. But this situation is changing as they come to realise that the war cannot be won by purely military means. One particular group, with representatives residing in London, has been taking advantage of the promotional value of laying on productive trips for camera crews and journalists. Presenting an acceptable image to Westerners, far from the stereotype of 'fanatical, bearded, Muslims', they appear able to provide trips inside at short notice, and, for those considered important enough, a display of 'fighting'.

### **Truth and Distortion**

It is not only insufficient media coverage but also the quality of the coverage which fashions the public's view of the war. Just before Christmas 1984, a well produced documentary called 'Kabul Autumn' was shown, which Channel 4 described as the first 'uncensored' report from Afghanistan which would raise important questions about previous television reports which depicted the country as being the victim of Soviet oppression. Like 'Behind the Afghan Curtain' (ITV) two years earlier, this was filmed in circumstances in which the crew were carefully shepherded around and only shown what the government wanted them to see. Presented as the view of the Afghan government they are good films; shown as the 'truth', they are biased, unprofessional reports.

Even magazines of international standing can be guilty of misinformation. In the summer of 1984, the CIA, in an attempt to silence its critics, planted a story which claimed that they were involved in running a well-developed weapons pipeline into Afghanistan. Journalists on the ground knew otherwise, but the story was picked up and published in *Time* magazine. In the same week, *Newsweek* magazine, capitalising on an official visit two of their correspondents made to Kabul, produced an article which gave the impression the government were in control of most of the country. Proper reference to journalists covering the war from the resistance side would have shown otherwise.

The lack of understanding which prevails on the subject of the war allows these articles to stand virtually unchallenged.

### **'Russians are Baddies'**

The shock and outrage that followed the revelation of the deaths of 200 civilians in the My Lai massacre committed by US servicemen was another

nail in the coffin of US involvement in Vietnam. Yet in 1985, Soviet forces appear to have massacred civilians on a far greater scale in Afghanistan, but there has been no public outcry. Why?

Apart from the problem of being able to verify the numbers killed and bring out evidence, one factor that may help to explain this is the West's image of the government and military of the Soviet Union. As photographer Chris Gregory put it, 'the war in Afghanistan embarrasses no-one, except the Russians. Everyone believes the Russians are baddies anyway, so how can they be embarrassed?' And it is embarrassment which often makes a good news story and can lead to change.

Due to the low level of Western media coverage the Soviet Union is often in a position to deny reports, many of which cannot be easily verified. During the lead up to the Summit meeting between Gorbachev and Reagan, Soviet attacks continued unabated, yet there were hardly any journalists around to report it.

This tends to lead to the conclusion that if it was the Americans, and not Soviet forces, occupying Afghanistan, world reaction would be different.

### **Full-Time Correspondents**

It is a sad reflection on the interest of the Western media that the only full-time correspondent, assigned in 1985 by a major newspaper to solely cover Afghanistan, is over 60 years of age. Arthur Bonner of the *New York Times* has made a number of long journeys inside. Yet bringing out the news of the war usually requires the stamina of people half his age. Apart from this lack of full-time correspondents, even the number of freelancers is small, when compared to the interest shown in Vietnam and Beirut. Six years on, no permanent bureaux have been set up, and news executives have backed away from the challenge posed in providing regular coverage of the war. The BBC only has one man to cover both Pakistan and Afghanistan, due to lack of funds and the difficulty of finding correspondents for what is considered to be a 'hardship posting'. It is impossible for him to cover Afghanistan adequately while being based in the Pakistan capital, Islamabad. This lack of coverage demonstrates the real need for full-time correspondents to be based close to the border in Peshawar, some of whom could make regular journeys into Afghanistan.

Unless we see an increased commitment, not only from journalists but also from the editors and controllers of the Western media, the war will continue in obscurity. As with the Concentration Camps in the Second World War, and, more recently, the genocidal policies of Pol Pot in Kampuchea, the full extent of the casualties and destruction in Afghanistan may only be revealed afterwards when it is too late.

# Women in the Jihad

*by Fatima Gailani*

Little is heard about the role of women in the resistance to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. In this article, **Fatima Gailani**, the London representative of the National Islamic Front of Afghanistan and eldest daughter of Pir Gailani, its political leader, attempts to clarify the position of women in present day Afghanistan.

A recent TV report featured an interview with Dr. Anahita Ratebzad, a woman minister in the Karmal Government. During this interview, which was accompanied by a film clip of women working in a factory in Afghanistan, the Minister attempted to draw a favourable contrast between the situation of women before, and since, the invasion of 1979. She implied that, before this date, women had been despised and oppressed, but that the coming of Communism had liberated them and brought them into a new world of opportunity. Since this programme, I have been asked on several occasions to what extent this account reflects the real situation, and so I should like to give an account of the position of women in Afghanistan both before and since the Soviet takeover.

It is not always realised how much Islam protects and enhances the position and dignity of women, giving them a role at the forefront of society. The Prophet Muhammad himself owed much to the financial support of his wife Khadija, who was actually his employer before he received his prophetic calling. This support was continued by his second wife Ayesha who, after the Prophet's death, became an important political and military leader. It is through her extraordinary powers of memorisation of about half of the Koran, that these writings were able to be compiled. The Prophet himself also taught that it was one's own mother who had the first, second and third claim on a person's life. The spread of true Islam has resulted in the affirmation of a woman's true worth and dignity. This is in marked contrast to the situation in the "liberated" West where at times women seem to be reduced to the status of a sex object.

Women in Islam have also, when necessary, fulfilled their solemn obligation to participate in Jihad, or Holy War. In Afghanistan, women following in the footsteps of Ayesha played a leading role in the struggle against the British in the 19th Century. Malalay was a poet and commander who inspired her soldiers to victory through her poetry, while Nazou-Ana was another leading resistance fighter at that time. This tradition of individual

valour has been carried on in the present Jihad and Nahid Shahid was the leader of the first anti-invasion demonstration in Kabul, during which she was killed, in 1981.

Indeed, at the present time, women are continuing to serve in the front line in the struggle for liberation. They provide food and shelter and protection for the freedom fighters, and have sometimes gone out laying mines in the fields on the pretext of collecting firewood. It is they who have sustained the highest casualties, falling victim to anti-personnel mines laid and hidden inside village houses by Soviet forces, and seeing their homes destroyed, and their children maimed or killed. Many women have become refugees abroad,

often suffering the pain of anxiety and separation from their menfolk fighting for the Mujahideen. For those left inside the country, the choice is either to become an internal refugee, trying to reach the border, or to flee temporarily to the hills when there is trouble, in the hope of returning to the village when danger is past, or else moving to the towns to find work, which is where those shots of the women in the factories come in.

The Communists are claiming credit for improving the situation of women in Afghanistan; they point to the presence of women in the professions, factories and even Government as evidence for this. But the fact is that such trends were under way before the



The role of women in Afghanistan is often misunderstood. Ironically, Soviet attacks on civilians may result in a reactionary backlash, which will set back the position of women, unless they cease and their forces withdraw. Photo: J. Gearing



invasion of 1979. With the spread of education, people were already beginning to see that the education and advancement of women were in no way opposed to Islam; the Prophet himself advised his followers to seek knowledge at any cost, even if this meant travelling to China for it, and this injunction applies equally to men and women. Before the invasion, people were beginning to see the value of sending their daughters to school or University, and there were a number of women doctors and teachers, seven Government ministers, one Senator, and a number of women MPs. Compared with the industrial countries, there was, it is true, much to be done, but in terms of the proportion of women in public life or the professions, Afghanistan was in no way lagging behind other more "advanced" states.

In the past, the major economic activity in Afghanistan was agriculture, which was an occupation in which men

and women shared equally. Now, however, our agriculture has been all but destroyed by the Soviets, who have burned crops and even poisoned the land itself. Most rural families have therefore been deprived of their homes, livelihoods, and in some cases even their breadwinners, so housewives have been forced into the cities, driven to suffer the vicissitudes of a cash economy with the attendant inflation and supply problems. The Soviets cannot even claim to have improved the economy, much less the social situation. The small canning and textile industries, previously supported by Afghanistan's agriculture, now depend mainly on imports. Hardly a sign of progress and economic independence!

The Soviets claim to be carrying out a revolution, sweeping away the old social order and replacing it with a 20th century industrial society. In this way, they say, women are being emancipated and beginning to take their

place on an equal footing with men. The film clip of women in the factory is supposed to be proof of this. However, if the Soviets had translated their concern for our society into the provision of schools for girls, instead of the destruction of our way of life, they would have found their efforts greatly appreciated, and a flood of eager students at their doors. Instead, by wiping out rural life, driving women into the cities and thereby attempting to catapult them into the 20th century, they are in the end only paving the way for such a reactionary backlash, and sowing the seeds of such a fear of progress, as will set back the position of women by 100 years or more. But once the Soviets withdraw their forces and end their attempts to manipulate our society through their puppet Government, the gradual progress towards women's emancipation by consent will soon resume.

## BOOK REVIEW

### Edward Girardet's *Afghanistan: The Soviet War*

Edward Girardet in his book *Afghanistan: The Soviet War* sets out to provide an informed appraisal of what this tragic conflict is all about. What sets his book apart from others on the subject are his six extensive journeys within Afghanistan.

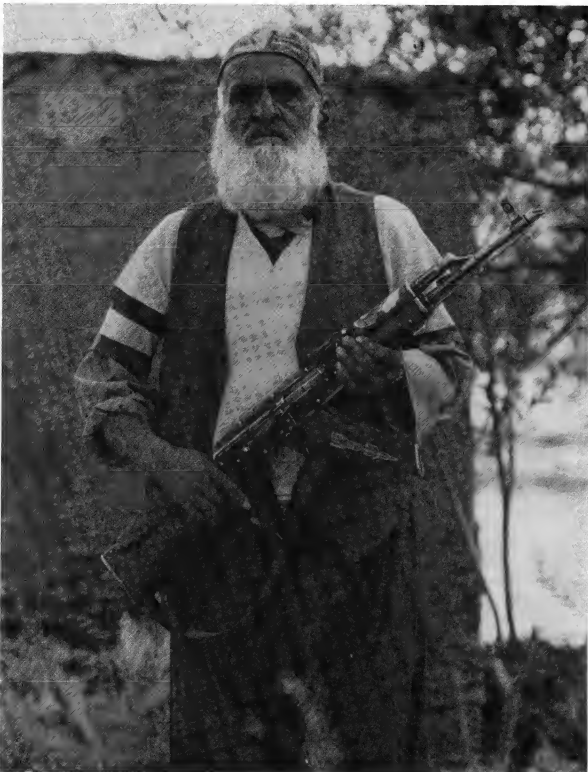
This has enabled the writer to intrude some of the entertaining idiosyncracies of a travel memoir upon this political and military review of the war. Some of his experiences and reported conversations give a sharp insight into the contradictions of Afghanistan.

"In Islam, one man does not steal from another." This was the reported declaration of a peasant on the Land Reform schemes of the Kabul revolutionary governments.

"Not yet a Mujahed, his facial expression bespoke a deep yearning for the day when he too could go on a raid." A line which reveals the basic belicosity behind part of the Afghan character which is at the very heart of the strength of the national resistance. Girardet's direct experiences bring the reader close to the actual conflict as in the view he enjoyed of the Soviet 5th offensive against the Panjshir valley. "In a site littered with Soviet cigarettes and empty cans of Bulgarian beans I had an awesome view of the field offensive."

As an eye witness of atrocities like the MIG 27 attack on a hapless refugee column, one is not surprised at his preliminary declared partiality for the forces of the resistance. Girardet is however careful to construct an unbiased view, which is clearly revealed in his review of the delicate Prisoner-of-war negotiations.

The penultimate chapter is a valuable review of the humanitarian work undertaken by the various European and American relief agencies. It is an inspiring chapter which provides some solace against the cruel facts of the Soviet war in Afghanistan, which Edward Girardet has so powerfully evoked. It is the most readable book to date on the war in Afghanistan.



*Afghanistan: The Soviet War* is published by Croom Helm in hardback with 260 pages at £17.95. It is available from the Afghanistan Support Committee, 18 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0LT for £12.95 plus 95 pence for postage and packing.

# Nuristan

## 'Land of Light' in the Hindu Kush

by Dr Schuyler Jones

Since the earliest times one of the most isolated regions in the Hindu Kush has been the extremely mountainous area between the Alingar River on the west and the Kunar River on the east that was known as Kafiristan. The Arabic word *Kāfir* means 'infidel' and was applied to those highland peoples who had held out against the tide of Islam and successive Muslim invaders. This region is now known as Nuristan.

As far as unambiguous records go, the first European to reach the borders of Kafiristan: to meet and converse with numerous Kafirs (they were from Waigal Valley) and to describe his experiences, was Dr William Griffith, M.D. (1847), who reached Chagha Serai and walked on to the very edge of Kafiristan, all the while coolly collecting plants and making detailed notes on bird life. The year: 1840. More than 40 years were to pass before another European would stand on that frontier.

In September 1885 Sir William Lockhart and Colonel R.G. Woodthorpe, accompanied by Surgeon G.M.J. Giles and Captain E.G. Barrow crossed the Zidig (Azetik) Pass and marched down the Bashgal Valley of NE Kafiristan as far as Bargramatal with an escort of 17 non-commissioned officers and men of the 24th Punjab Infantry, plus three non-commissioned officers of Bengal Cavalry and Infantry. This was the first expedition into Kafiristan; a military reconnaissance so secret that although a full report was written and printed, no account was ever published and only two or three copies of the report are now known to exist (Lockhart and Woodthorpe, 1889).

The most famous journeys in Kafiristan however were to be made in 1889-91 by Sir George Scott Robertson, M.D. whose book *The Kafirs of the Hindu Kush* (1896) remains the best account ever written of the people and the area. Travelling alone, Robertson made his way from Chitral into the lower Bashgal Valley to Kamedesh, where he established his base camp. He spent altogether more than a year in Kafiristan, travelling as far as Kushteki in the Parun Valley. He was the first, the last and most accurate observer of the pre-Muslim culture.

In retrospect one wonders how the pre-Muslim culture managed to survive as long as it did. By the 9th century AD the tide of Islam had swept across the Iranian plateau and north into Central Asia. By the 10th century one of the few areas between the Indus

and the Mediterranean to hold out against the spread of Islam was to be found in these narrow valleys of the Hindu Kush and for this reason the region was known to Muslims as a Kafiristan — 'land of infidels'. More than one ruler of the lands between the Oxus and the Indus had contemplated a conquest of Kafiristan, Amir Timur among them. The problems facing a would-be invader were formidable.



Isolated region — house in Nuristan.  
J. Gearing

Most of the villages were sited at approximately 6,000 feet above sea level and were approached only through miles of deep, narrow, rocky valleys, every yard of which was scattered with boulders and evergreen oak and thus offered ample cover to the defenders who were, moreover, fighting on home ground. A handful of determined men on the heights could, by dislodging boulders, keep an entire company of men well occupied for a

day. From early November until late March freezing temperatures at night and deep snow in the passes made things still more difficult from a military point of view. For several centuries the people of Kafiristan were secure against all attack behind the natural defences of the Hindu Kush. In time two factors combined to reduce the effectiveness of these defences and to make the Kafirs vulnerable to outside attack. The first was the political problem created for the Government of India by Russia's southward expansion into Central Asia and involving a certain nervousness on the part of Delhi and Whitehall at the prospect of sharing a border with Russia in Asia.

The second factor from the first, for the solution to Russia expansion was seen by some in Government to lie in the establishment of a strong, independent Afghanistan as a buffer state. This could be achieved only if the right man occupied the throne of Kabul. In 1880 this man — Abdur Rahman Khan — made his appearance, took the throne, and was more or less enthusiastically supported by the Government of India with an annual subsidy of rupees and quantities of the latest breech-loading rifles. The conquest of Kafiristan was now only a matter of time, for the generous subsidy of rupees and the rifles made it possible for Abdur Rahman to maintain a reasonably equipped standing army without imposing burdensome taxation on the people of Afghanistan. Once his boundaries with Iran, Russia and India had been demarcated he set about expanding his political control over the hitherto independent tribes within those boundaries, i.e., he sent his armies against them.

The first shots in this war against Kafirs were fired by Afghan troops in August of 1895 and although the Amir Abdur Rahman Khan anticipated a speedy victory, the last shots were not exchanged until the Spring of 1899. The invasion of Kafiristan forms, in itself, a considerable chapter in Afghan history. We need only mention here that by 1900, as far as we know, all the Kafirs had been converted to Islam and Kafiristan had become Nuristan — 'the land of light'.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 was undoubtedly seen by some men in Nuristan as an opportunity to take up arms against a common enemy, much as their grandfathers had done against earlier invaders.

# Brits in Afghanistan: Chris Gregory

**In our continuing series, Julian Gearing talks to Chris Gregory about her involvement in photographing the war in Afghanistan.**

Action photographs of the war in Afghanistan are few and far between; women photographers even fewer. Chris Gregory is one of literally a handful of women who have gone in to cover the war. What distinguishes Chris is that on her one and only trip to date, in the Spring of 1984, she came out with some of the most dramatic photographs to be published in the world press.

Her opportunity to go in came after she met and promptly married Andy Skrzypkowiak, a film cameraman whose dramatic news footage of attacks on convoys on the Salang Highway ranks among the best film to come out of Afghanistan.

'I always considered it a place I would never be able to get into as a woman. I was curious about it, it seemed to be a very isolated, romantic place, with romantic people. I couldn't quite believe that what the Russians were doing was as bad as has been reported, because I had visited Russia on a couple of occasions, and the ordinary Russians were just ordinary nice people, like anyone, anywhere.'

Chris has been a professional freelance photographer for over six years, working primarily on assignments for the top national newspapers and magazines. 'I had been an English teacher for 10 years, when one day I saw some pictures of Don McCullin's and I was impressed by the level of communication, that depth. I thought I wanted to communicate like that myself. So I just resigned my job and retrained. Its hard. You give away a lot of security.'

Although Chris is a forceful woman with feminist ideals, travelling in a Muslim country meant adapting to a male-orientated society, in which women may be considered 'second-class citizens' by Western standards. Did she have any difficulties on the trip?

'I had absolutely no problem as a woman on the trip at all. The way the muj (mujahideen) got over it was by treating me like a man, and so long as I always made for the corner in any building, so that nobody had to sit next to me, that made things easier, and Andy always sat by me. I was always very sensitive to that and I always wore a headscarf, from the moment I woke in the morning when I slept, because, it is very strange, but I actually began to feel undressed without it. I felt quite embarrassed to be seen without it, and that was out of respect for them. I know

that a couple of the French female doctors we were with didn't, and I wish they had, but that was their choice.'

After an abortive attempt to reach the Panjshir Valley and the Salang Highway, they were forced to return to Pakistan due to Russians blocking the way. Chris and Andy then returned by a different route.

'The journey in was no more difficult than walking on the Brecon Beacons. But as soon as we got into the Panjshir it was extraordinarily hard. By then I had developed flu, and also we had no horses to leave the gear on, as we had on the way in. When we got to the Panjshir we had to carry our own gear. I only had what I stood up in. Off we set



Chris Gregory

with just my camera gear on me. Now that was hard, going up this steep slope at 14 to 15,000 feet, sinking to our thighs in snow, and over the top of it you could see the Russian helicopters, you could hear the bombing. I had a dreadful cold and I remember with my head down and the weight on my back, pulling against me, with tears in the back of my eyes, knowing this is the hardest thing I have ever done in my life. It was so hard because it just went on and on. I couldn't cope with the weight of my pack, it had all my Nikons and all my gear in it. Andy in the end took not only his pack, but my pack as well, and he just carried on climbing. He was still way ahead of me.

The muj couldn't take it as they had ammunition and heavy Kalashnikovs. When we got to the top, one of the muj then offered to take the spare pack. And in return I took his gun, and there is some irony in that because I am a pacifist, not a supporter of arms, and I ended up carrying his gun in return for my giving him the pack. We then went down to the Salang Highway.'

The major supply road from the U.S.S.R. the Salang is one of the most dangerous areas in the country, due to frequent ambush of convoys by the mujahideen, which usually result in heavy Russian retaliation. After photographing one such ambush, Chris and Andy were caught up in the bombing.

'For the whole of this day we were bombed for about 8 hours, at very close quarters, and we were so aware that a direct hit, that would have been it. Even then I wasn't frightened, and it is not to do with being brave. It was to do with the fact that your mind is so occupied with what is going on, that all you are concerned with is staying alive. Number one - staying alive, number two - getting the photographs. I was frightened at first when the bullets started to fly, confused because I didn't know where they were coming from. The posts were firing on us. Also you are aware that the helicopters are going to start bombing. Of course the sensible thing to do is to stay by the road because they are not going to bomb the road, but the lower the helicopters come the easier they can get you with their machine guns. We were bombed all day and that was frightening. Every single wadi, every single possible place, they were dropping bombs. Initially they weren't coming low enough to actually see anything because they were afraid of heavy machine-gun fire. But very soon the muj ran out of ammo, and then they came in very, very low, and then they were really searching. Sixty to seventy feet. I remember one of them, you could see the actual flames, the spurts of yellow as the machine-guns were being fired, just plastering the valley where we were, and I remember being certain that that was it. At that point I knew that any movement would have given our position away. That would have been a great photo to take, however it is not only me at risk, but everybody else.'

'I remember whizzing across a very fast flowing stream, just running across it never mind where the rocks are, hiding on the side, just as they passed by, thinking 'they are going to come back this time', but somehow they didn't. With dusk all the fighting stopped, and an eerie quietness descended. It was like listening to 'Radio 1' full blast all day and then being in a graveyard afterwards.'

That evening was Chris's first experience of 'Stalin Organs' (ground-to-ground BM-21 missiles), trained on mountain tracks at night. 'Now that was frightening. We were right in the middle of it, and right on the track they were aiming at. The rockets were exploding all around us. They were judging that muj would be on that track and they were right. And you could hear in the silence the shrapnel falling, very, very close by, and the blinding flash, and the rush of air, and the crash.'

'Andy just kept pushing me and actually hitting me to move on, to run. I was running and running and that was really quite unnerving. We wanted to stay in a village but we were told that the Russians would be coming. And we discovered that night that they landed troops there, and so we would have been in real trouble if we had stayed.'

'Although we were with the muj we



A moment of peace in a war which is taking an increasing toll of civilian lives.  
Chris Gregory

didn't have a guide, and spent the time moving backwards and forwards, just to avoid detection. We couldn't get out of the area. We were trapped. Wherever we went there were Russians. After 10 days of this I was saying, 'look I can't take anymore of this, let's get out of here', and in the end Andy created a fuss, and we eventually got somebody to take us somewhere, and then we were on our way out.'

'I have been in a lot of fairly risky situations before, and it does frighten me, but I know that as soon as I get my camera to my eye I am alright. A lot of the time I want to do it, and so I was wondering whether I would cope with the situation in Afghanistan. I could cope, but it was only the length of it after the days of trying to escape, when we were trapped, then knowing that maybe I couldn't cope, and then understanding how the families must feel, because they cannot get out, even if there was anywhere to go to. Where do you go, Pakistan? And leave behind everything that is yours. That was very salutary, it was a very important

experience for me to have that kind of fear, it made me understand and identify a great deal with the Afghan civilians.'

'Journalistically, Afghanistan is extremely strong, very important. When we were inside I asked Andy why are there not more journalists here, and Andy just smiled. And now I know why. Its just so hard to get to, for a start, and then it is so dangerous. It is dreadfully sad that there aren't masses of photographers covering the war. A great many journalist colleagues have actually said to me that they can't understand our obsession with Afghanistan. Why the interest? Nobody wants to know. What they want to know about is Belfast, or Lebanon, they are not interested in Afghanistan. The other point is that it is the Russians who are in occupation, therefore any news sent home about the Russians being naughty, really doesn't have much effect, because everybody knows that Russians are naughty anyway. So the Russians are baddies, and so all that you are doing is reaffirming that

they are baddies. Nobody is embarrassed by the war, unlike the Americans in Vietnam. Embarrassment makes a good news story.'

'While the bombs were coming in, when the ground was shaking and shuddering like some incredible earthquake, I remember thinking all I want to do now is get out, go home, and have a baby. It was the most peaceful and purist thing I could think of. I never thought that before.'

Despite the difficult conditions, Chris wanted to go back. but just before she was about to go in on another trip with Andy, she found she was pregnant. After some debate she decided not to go. 'Part of me did want to go, and part of me was glad not to. One thing that trip did for me was to make me realise how wonderful it is to live in a land where bombs are not going to drop, where you are not frightened every moment of the day, where you are not looking for cover every moment of the day, and where people can just sit down in a green field and not have to look at the sky.'



'I only took four frames of this because the bullets were flying. It was dreadfully risky. I just got up, took the pictures, knowing that at any time I could have been shot.' Resistance attack on convoy on the Salang Highway 1984. Chris Gregory

# CONTENTS



COVER CARTOON BY TONY AUTH .....	1
FOREWORD FROM THE PRIME MINISTER.....	2
RESISTANCE UNDER PRESSURE 1985.....	3-6
THE AFGHAN RESISTANCE AND THE ARABS.....	7
HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFGHANISTAN .....	8-10
EXTRACTS FROM STATEMENTS TO MARK THE SIXTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SOVIET INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN .....	10-11
WESTERN MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN.....	11-13
WOMEN IN THE JIHAD.....	15
BOOK REVIEW, EDWARD GIRARDET'S, AFGHANISTAN THE SOVIET WAR.....	15
NURISTAN, LAND OF LIGHT IN THE HINDU KUSH.....	16
BRITS IN AFGHANISTAN, CHRIS GREGORY .....	17-19
NEWS FROM THE SUPPORT GROUPS.....	20

- Contributions, responses to contributions, and any other comments are warmly welcomed.

*They should be sent to: The Editor, at the address below:*

- "Free Afghanistan" is published by the Afghanistan Support Committee, 18 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0HR.

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## The Afghanistan Support Committee

The Afghanistan Support Committee is an all-party pressure group chaired by The Viscount Cranborne, MP. Our aim is to keep the plight of Afghan people in the forefront of the minds of the British people, and to support the Afghan Resistance to the Soviet invasion.

We do not support any one Resistance group nor do we involve ourselves in any military aid. Our purpose is rather to maximise press and media coverage of the war in Afghanistan; to ensure that the case of the mujahideen is heard and to produce and disseminate information together with our own publicity material.

Whenever possible we use volunteer workers which helps to minimise our small administrative costs. Any surplus is passed on to Afghanaid to relieve suffering inside Afghanistan.

Afghanaid is an independent charity which has a policy of funding relief work inside Afghanistan directly to the victims of the war. Secretariat services are provided for it by the Afghanistan Support Committee, but the two organisations are distinct with separate policy-making committees.

The Committee includes MPs from the Conservative, Labour, SDP, Liberal and Scottish National parties and a number of active independent members.

## Oxfordshire Afghanistan Support Group

Activities during October and November included a joint meeting with Oxford Union Society with Lord Home of the Hirsell and Lord Stewart of Fulham, both patrons of the Afghanistan Support Committee, and Mrs Romey Fullerton, the Director, as speakers. The consequences of the Soviet leaders use of force to achieve their political aims, the need for sustaining Afghan morale and to alert the world as to what is being done were the main points of the speakers. A well attended meeting led to several questions and condemnation of Soviet actions.

The next meeting was disappointing in numbers attending. However, the interesting talk and fascinating slides from Peers Carter, on his and his wife's rigorous visit to Turkestan made it very worthwhile.

## Belfast University Support Group

Simon Crawford, of the Belfast University Support Group was able to send over £200 to Afghanaid this December. This had been resourcefully raised by Stephen Leckey who had organised, crewed and arranged sponsorship for an Afghan boat in the annual December Hen Island boat race.